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Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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SIL-01 LAB-04 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 DOE-11 SOE-02
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----------019865 241719Z /43
R 240933Z FEB 78
FM AMCONSUL MILAN
TO AMEMBASSY ROME
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5861

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MILAN 0277

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJ: LEADING CORRIERE JOURNALIST ON HOT ISSUES

1. CONGEN AND DPO MET FEB. 22 WITH WALTER TOBAGI, YOUNG, CEREBRAL CORRIERE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT WHO HAS BEEN DOING EXCELLENT ON THE SPOT REPORTING OF TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENTS. HE DID UNIVERSITY WORK ON ITALIAN UNIONS AND KNOWS SUBJECT IN DEPTH ALTHOUGH HE NOW COVERS WATERFRONT ON POLITICAL ISSUES. TOBAGI HAS REPUTATION AS SERIOUS, NON-COMMUNIST, FRIENDLY TO US.

2. TOBAGI THOUGHT THE PCI AND THE UNIONS WERE BECOMING MORE MODERATE AND THAT IN GREAT PART BECAUSE OF INTERNAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES, SPECIFICALLY THE FORMATION OF A BUREAUCRACY TO ADMINISTER THESE ORGANIZATIONS. ONCE THE WORK HAD BEEN DONE BY IDEALISTIC VOLUNTEERS. NOW PAID, CAREER-MINDED BUREAUCRATS HAS LARGELY TAKEN THEIR PLACE. UNION WORK, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS DONE BY SOME 4,000 FULL-TIMERS IN MILAN, GENOA, AND TURIN ALONE. THUS THE PROPORTION OF MORE RADICAL AND FREE SPIRITS HAD DIMINISHED GREATLY IN RECENT YEARS. THE PCI AND THE UNIONS WERE ACCORDINGLY A GOOD DEAL MORE MODERATE IN THE COMPOSITION OF THEIR LEADERSHIP. ON THE OTHER HAND, CONTINUED TOBAGI,
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THE HARDLINERS STILL HAD A FOLLOWING WITHIN THE PCI. HE HAD DONE THE WELL-PUBLICIZED INTERVIEW WITH LUIGI LONGO TWO MONTHS AGO.

3. ALTHOUGH HE KNEW THAT LONGO WAS NOW A GRAND OLD MAN WHO COUNTED FOR LITTLE WITHIN THE PARTY, HE STILL COUNTED FOR SOMETHING. (TOBAGI COMMENTED THAT THE LONGO INTERVIEW HAD BEEN TAPE RECORDED AND THAT LONGO HAD ASKED TO SEE THE ARTICLE IN

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ADVANCE AND HAD APPROVED IT. THEREFORE IT WAS COMPLETELY AUTHORITATIVE. HE SAID, TOO, THAT LONGO HAD BEEN ANXIOUS TO SPEAK, AS THOUGH HE DID NOT OFTEN ENOUGH HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO SO.)

4. MOREOVER, TOBAGI'S COLLEAGUES AT L'UNITA' TOLD HIM AS RECENTLY AS LAST YEAR THAT THEY GOT LOTS OF LETTERS COMPLAINING THE PAPER WAS TOO CRITICAL TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. ASKED ABOUT A RECENT POLL IN WHICH FEWER THAN 3 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS HAD NAMED THE SOVIET UNION AS THEIR IDEA OF THE MODEL ITALY SHOULD FOLLOW, TOBAGI REPLIED THAT AS LATE AS 1975, RESPONDENTS WERE THOUGHT TO BE LYING ABOUT THEIR PREFERENCE FOR THE COMMUNISTS AND THAT, SIMILARLY, A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PEOPLE COULD TODAY BE RELUCTANT TO ADMIT THEY FAVORED SUCH AN UNPOPULAR NOTION AS RUSSIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPERIORITY.

5. AT ANY RATE, TOBAGI DID NOT WANT TO EXAGGERATE THE PRESENCE OF THE HARDLINERS WITHIN THE PCI RANK AND FILE, BUT NEITHER DID HE THINK THEY HAD VANISHED.

6. MOVING TO THE PSI, TOBAGI SAID HE THOUGHT THE COMMUNISTS HAD BEEN SO ANXIOUS TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE PARTY THROUGH ENRICO MANCA THAT THEY HAD ACTUALLY ENGINEERED THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS TO BLOCK THE PSI CONGRESS CRAXI HAD CALLED TO ELIMINATE THE MANCA-MANCINI MAJORITY ON THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND REPLACE IT WITH ONE OF HIS OWN. THE COMMUNISTS WERE DOING EVERYTHING CONFIDENTIAL

POSSIBLE TO KEEP THE PSI FROM GOING BACK TO A COALITION WITH THE DC.

7. DOWN WITHIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY, TOBAGI SAW AN ATTEMPT TO REVIVIFY PSI CONTACT WITH THE ELECTORATE. THAT WAS NOW THE PARTY'S MAIN WEAK POINT. BOTH THE DC AND PCI HAD NUMEROUS POINTS OF CONTACT WITH THE REAL WORLD, BUT THE PSI HAD VERY FEW.

8. WHAT ABOUT THE UNION REACTION TO LAMA'S NEW, MARKET-ORIENTED LINE AND THE POLICY APPROVED IN ROME ON FEBRUARY 14? TOBAGI THOUGHT OPPOSITION TO BOTH WAS SIGNIFICANT AND THAT IT WOULD NOT BE EASY TO PUT LAMA'S GOOD INTENTIONS INTO PRACTICE.

9. FIRST OF ALL, TOBAGI, SAID THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF OPPOSITION AT THE INTERMEDIATE AND LOWER UNION LEVELS TO THE NEW LINE. ITS NEAR-UNANIMOUS ACCEPTANCE IN ROME REFLECTED THE HIGH RANK OF THE DELEGATES MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE. THERE HAD BEEN SIMILAR LOWER LEVEL OPPOSITION TO THE UNIDAL AGREEMENT (WHEREBY WORKERS FOR THE FIRST TIME ARE TO BE LET GO BY A STATE-OWNED COMPANY).

10. TOBAGI SAID, TOO, THAT BOTH BENVENUTO AND MACARIO HAD TOLD HIM THAT LAMA HAD BEEN MISQUOTED BUT HAD NOT TAKEN

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PUBLIC ISSUE WITH LA REPUBBLICA BECAUSE THE PCI NEEDS THAT PAPER'S GOODWILL. TOBAGI FOUND THAT REASONING PRETTY THIN, BUT THOUGHT IT SIGNIFICANT THAT THE VERY TOP UNION LEADERSHIP WAS DISOWNING THE IDEAS ATTRIBUTED TO LAMA.

11. SECONDLY, THIS OPPOSITION WOULD MAKE PUTTING LAMA'S POLICY INTO OPERATION SO HARD THAT TOBAGI DOUBTED IT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED, AT LEAST NOT IN THE SHORT TERM. HE WAS CONVINCED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT ANY ATTEMPT, SAY, EVEN TO MOVE CORRIERE TYPESETTERS TODAY FROM ONE LOCATION TO ANOTHER WOULD CAUSE SUCH HOWLS THAT IT WOULD HAVE TO BE ABANDONED.

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12. TOBAGI CONCLUDED THAT THE 180 DEGREE CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS UNION POSITIONS THAT THE FEBRUARY 14 DOCUMENT EMBODIED (E.G., ABANDONING THE RIGID UNION REFUSAL TO SURRENDER JOBS) REQUIRED MUCH MORE TIME THAN THE UNION LEADERSHIP WAS ALLOWING. CHANGES OF THAT MAGNITUDE NEEDED TIME TO RIPEN.

13. AND WHAT ABOUT THE CATHOLIC REVIVAL THAT APPEARED TO BE TAKING PLACE? TOBAGI THOUGHT IT WAS OCCURRING, THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT, AND THAT THE MAIN REASON WAS RELIGIOUS ALTHOUGH THE REACTION AGAINST LEFTIST CULTURAL HEGEMONY WAS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR, TOO. HE ALSO FELT THE PHONOMENON WAS TRANSLATABLE INTO VOTES FOR THE DC. ALBEIT NOT IN A MECHANISTIC WAY.

14. AT THE CORRIERE, THE TRANSITION FROM PIERO OTTONE TO NEW DIRECTOR FRANCO DI BELLA WAS PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY NOTHWITHSTANDING THE TEMPEST THAT SUSPICIONS OF FOREIGN FINANCING HAD CAUSED AT THE TIME OF THE CHANGE. DI BELLA'S EASY ACCEPTANCE, HE SAID, WAS DUE TO THE FRIENDSHIPS AND GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS HE HAD

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BUILT UP DURING HIS TENURE AS VICE DIRECTOR. HE WAS A COMPASSIONATE, PRACTICAL, AND DECISIVE MAN WHO SOLVED PROBLEMS FOR HIS SUBORDINATES WITH A MINIMUM OF FUSS. EVEN ECONOMICS PAGE EDITOR ASSIMO RIVA, WHO HAD BEEN THE MOST OUTSPOKEN VOICE ON THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE, HAD NEVER TAKEN OUT AFTER DI BELLA
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